



The Ego-Soul Dynamics of Leadership Development

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INTRODUCTION

No one is born a leader. A leader is someone you become: not in the same way you become an engineer, businessman, a dentist or a doctor. It is a role you grow into. Some people naturally grow into leadership roles; some go all out to seek a leadership role and others have leadership thrust upon them. Some, like me, choose not to be a leader of people, but a leader of thoughts. Whatever the case, the journey to becoming a *successful* leader is the same; there are seven stages of psychological development you must master to become a great leader. If you fail to master a particular stage, you will not become a great leader. You may become a good leader or a recognized leader, but you will not be remembered as a great leader. Becoming a great leader is the journey of evolutionary leadership through ego development to soul activation.

OVERVIEW

Every person on the planet follows the same evolutionary path during the first twenty-four years of their lives. This is called the journey of ego-development. There are three stages to this journey, learning how to survive, learning how to keep safe and learning how to feel secure. The extent to which you are able to master these stages of development affects your ability to master the last three stages of psychological development—the stages of soul activation.

The fourth stage of your journey is the bridge between the ego stages of development and the soul stages of development. This stage, which begins in your mid-twenties and continues through to your late 30s is called individuation. During this is the stage of development you learn to master the fears you developed during the first three stages of development so that you can become an adaptive, viable, independent individual. Only when you have successfully



mastered this stage of development are you fit to embark on the last three stages of development and learn how to become a great leader.

To master the soul activations stages of development you must learn how to self-actualize—find your purpose and express your unique gifts and talents; make a difference by connecting with others in unconditional loving relationships, and serve the greater good through continuously contributing acts of self-less service.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

From a leadership development perspective, we can split this journey into four stages, individuating; self-actualizing; integrating and serving.

Depending on the lens through which you view leadership development, you can say these four stages are: a) an evolutionary journey of psychological development; b) an evolutionary journey of spiritual development; or c) an evolutionary journey of personal fulfilment. Whatever lens you use, it is impossible to avoid the importance of mastering the ego-soul dynamics of the stage of development you are at and the stages of development you have passed through were you still have unmet needs, because the mastery of each stage of development is a necessary prerequisite for the mastery of the following stage. If you fail to master one stage you will need to go back, review and adjust the changes you made to your values and beliefs in the previous stage in order to move forward.

In this respect, the individuating stage is paramount. You will find yourself constantly returning to this stage of development as you move through the higher stages of development. This is because, we cannot self-actualize if we still have survival fears from the first stage of ego development; we cannot integrate, if we still have relationship fears from the second stage of ego development; and, we cannot find fulfilment through acts of self-less service, if we still have self-esteem fears from the third stage of ego development. With this context, we are now in a position to understand the seven stages of psychological development which are summarized in the following table.

Stages of psychological development	Age range	Developmental task	Motivation	Developmental focus	
				Internal	External
Serving	60+ years	Alleviating suffering and caring for the well-being of future generations, humanity and the planet.	Satisfying your need for self-less service.	Compassion	Contribution
Integrating	50–59 years	Connecting with others in unconditional loving relationships.	Satisfying your need to make a difference.	Empathy	Connection
Self-actualizing	40–49 years	Expressing your true nature by embracing your soul’s values and purpose.	Satisfying your need to find meaning and purpose.	Authenticity	Self-expression
Individuating	25–39 years	Discovering your true identity by letting go of your dependence on others.	Satisfying your need for freedom and autonomy.	Responsibility	Accountability
Differentiating	8–24 years	Establishing yourself in a community by displaying your gifts, skills and talents.	Satisfying your need for respect and recognition.	Security	Achievement
Conforming	2–7 years	Feeling safe and protected by staying close to your kin and your family.	Satisfying your need for love, and belonging.	Safety	Harmony
Surviving	Birth to 2 years	Staying alive and physically healthy by getting your survival needs met.	Satisfying your need for physiological survival.	Health	Survival



THE SEVEN STAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

SURVIVING (0–2 YEARS)

The quest for survival starts before the human baby is born; it begins in the womb. From the moment the reptilian mind/brain becomes functional, around the end of the first trimester of gestation, the primary focus of the mind of the foetus is survival.

Because of its species programming, the foetus, and later the baby instinctively knows how to regulate its body's internal functioning, how to suckle once it is born and how to signal to its mother that it has unmet physiological needs. At this stage of development, the baby is completely dependent for its survival on its mother or other primary caregivers.

The first thing the baby has to learn, as soon as it is born, is to interact with the world around it so it can get its survival needs met. If the infant finds this task difficult or challenging because its parents or caregivers are not vigilant, or if it is abused or left alone or abandoned for long periods of time, the infant may form subconscious fear-based beliefs that the world is an unsafe place and that it is not loved.

Thereafter, throughout his or her life, this person will seek to control their environment and relationships to assure their needs get met. Such a person will be cautious and vigilant and have a tendency to control or micro-manage whatever is happening in their world. They may also be impatient and demanding about getting what they want. If the hardships suffered during this stage of development are severe, this person will be suspicious of the intentions of others and may have much suppressed anger which they project onto others when they don't get their needs met later in life.

If the infant's parents or caregivers are attentive to its needs and are watchful and responsive to signs of distress, then the child will grow up with the feeling that the world is a safe place and people can be trusted. Feeling competent and confident about taking care of your needs is an essential prerequisite for mastering the self-actualization stage of development later in life.

CONFORMING (2–7 YEARS)

Towards the end of the surviving stage of development, the child becomes mobile and learns to communicate. This is the time when the limbic mind/brain, also known as the emotional mind, becomes dominant. The focus of the limbic mind/brain is on physical and emotional safety—keeping the body safe from harm, and satisfying its need for love and belonging. Thus begins the conforming stage of development.



At first, the child rebels: it wants what it wants when it wants it. It has not yet learned that the people it depends on for its survival and safety also have needs. To get its needs met, the child learns to follow the rules laid down by its parents. It learns that life is more pleasant and enjoyable, less threatening and less difficult if it can live in a state of harmony with its caregivers and siblings.

Conforming—obeying the rules—has benefits: it allows the child to meet its physical and emotional safety needs. Participating in family rituals are also important at this stage of development because they contribute to the child's feeling of belonging and safety. If the parents make the child's adherence to rules conditional on the child getting its desires met, or the child is coerced into behaving in specific ways, the child will learn that love is conditional.

If, because of poor parenting or lack of attention, the child feels unloved, unimportant, not accepted and not protected or it doesn't feel a sense of belonging, the child may develop the subconscious fear-based belief that it is unlovable. When you do not get your safety needs met at a young age, they do not go away; they are imprinted in the subconscious memory of your emotional mind. As an adult, you become subconsciously needy, always searching for love or wanting to be liked. You will blame others for your mistakes because you desperately need the love and adoration of the authority figures in your life.

If the child's parents or caregivers are attentive to the child's needs; if it is raised in a caring, loving environment, where it feels safe and protected, then the child will grow up with the desire and willingness to form committed relationships when it reaches adulthood.

Learning to feel safe, comfortable and loved is an essential prerequisite for mastering the integrating stage of development later in life. If you don't feel safe with others—if you have fear-based beliefs about your emotional safety in the presence of strangers—you will find it difficult to reach out and connect later in life.

DIFFERENTIATING (8–24 YEARS)

Around the age of 7 or 8, the neocortex mind/brain becomes functional and dominant. The focus of the neocortex mind/brain, also known as the rational mind, is on physical and emotional security. Thus begins the differentiating stage of psychological development.

At this stage of development, the child is beginning to explore the world outside of the home. Whereas parental and sibling relations were of significant importance to satisfy the child's safety



needs when the locus of its life was the parental home, relations with peers and authority figures such as teachers, now take on added importance.

Once a child enters a community outside the home it can no longer rely on its parents for its personal safety. It takes responsibility for its self-protection by belonging to a group, community or gang. This means building friendships, fitting in, and being respected by members of the group. Taking on dares can become a rite of passage for membership of some groups in the teenager's or young adult's world. This may lead young people "off the straight and narrow". They may do things they know to be wrong simply to belong to a group where they can feel recognized and secure.

Feeling respected and recognized by parents or members of a group enables us to establish a feeling of self-worth; feeling accepted and acknowledged, gives us a sense of belonging and security. The gifts, skills, and talents that allow us to feel recognized become important to us. We focus on them because they are our passport to security.

The types of gifts or talents we develop depend, to a large extent on the type of community we belong to. These could include beauty, intelligence, strength, sporting ability, musical ability, fearlessness, etc. Developing our strengths—the things that bring us recognition—allow us to establish ourselves in a community. If, however, we want to become the group leader, we need to stand out from the crowd. We may need to prove our superiority or defend ourselves from those who also want to lead the group.

What is important at this stage of development is exploring your talents and getting positive feedback and appreciation for your efforts. If your efforts are not appreciated by those who are important to you, particularly your parents and teachers, you will stop trying, and may begin to develop a low sense of self-esteem. If instead of having your efforts appreciated, you are constantly reminded of your failures, you will grow up lacking in confidence, with a low sense of self-worth, and the belief that you are not good enough.

When you do not get your security needs met in your childhood or teenage years, they do not go away; they remain in your subconscious mind. Later in life you will either become highly competitive or seek status or power so you can be acknowledged as someone important or someone to be feared or you will hold back, never speak and hide in the shadows.

If you do not get the approval and feedback you need from your parents, you may seek out groups, gangs or communities where you feel accepted and valued; where your gifts, skills or talents are recognized. This may create conflict in your life at home because you may get caught between two value systems: the values of your parents, and the values of the group with which



you identify. If this situation is not handled sensitively by your parents, your home life will become difficult and may become intolerable. You will rebel.

From a parental perspective, guiding rather than controlling, allowing rather than preventing, encouraging rather than denigrating and trusting rather than doubting, gives teenagers space to safely explore who they are and find their sense of identity in the larger world outside the family home.

Feeling physically and emotionally secure in your community—being respected and recognized by others—is an essential prerequisite for mastering the serving stage of development later in life. If you don't feel confident and secure in your community, you will not be able to contribute.

INDIVIDUATING (25–39 YEARS)

Around your mid-20s you begin to feel a new impulse: you want to explore who you really are. You want freedom and the feeling of independence. To do this, you must let go of your parental programming and cultural conditioning and find your own way in life.

If you can transition through the first three stages of development without experiencing any significant trauma or without developing too many subconscious fears, you will find it relatively easy to establish yourself as a viable independent adult in the social and cultural framework of your existence.

So long as you can find opportunities to earn a living that allow you to explore your freedom, and work that gives you autonomy, everything will be fine. If you cannot find work that allows you to taste your independence, you will feel demoralized or dispirited.

The task at the individuating stage of development is to find your authentic self. You are finished with being dependent; you are seeking to become a viable, independent adult. You are no longer looking for the validation of others to feel good about yourself. You want to be responsible and accountable for every aspect of your life; you want to embrace and express your values. Without realizing it, you are dis-embedding yourself from your parental and cultural background, and beginning to align the motivations of your ego with the motivations of your soul.

This shift from dependence to independence can be one of the most difficult stages of human development to master because it brings us face to face with our survival, safety and security fears. Many find it difficult to extract themselves from the influence of their parents; others, such as those who live in authoritarian or repressive regimes, may be afraid to express

themselves because they know they can be locked up or lose their life for speaking their truth or expressing any sexual preferences that go against the norm.

If you were fortunate enough to have been brought up by self-actualized parents; to have lived in a community or culture where freedom and independence are celebrated, where higher education was easily available, where men and women are treated equally, where differences are valued, and where you are encouraged from a young age to express your needs and think for yourself, you will find it relatively easy to move through the individuating stage of psychological development.

If the contrary is true, if you were brought up by authoritarian parents, if you do not live in a democratic regime, if you are discriminated against because of your gender, sexual preferences, religion or race, and you developed fears about not being able to meet your survival, safety or security needs, you are likely to have difficulties moving through the individuating stage of development. Struggling to survive, and seeking the safety and security you did not get when you were young can keep you anchored in the lower levels of consciousness all of your life.

Leadership development goals at the individuating stage of development

The primary leadership development goals at the individuating stage of psychological development are to a) know yourself—identify your most important values and the behaviours that align with those values; b) become responsible and accountable for every aspect of your life; and c) learn to manage your fears and develop your emotional intelligence skills. In addition, you will want to be given the freedom, autonomy, and challenges that allow you to explore your gifts and talents—opportunities to find out what you are good at and like doing and what you are not so good at and do not like doing. Without freedom, autonomy and challenges, you will become disengaged.

I was very fortunate in this regard, because when I was 26, I was asked by the prestigious British Engineering firm I worked for to open an office in Paris. I learned during the next five years that I was good at my work and good at getting work, but I did not enjoy managing people. I swore after that experience that if I ever started a company of my own I would not employ many employees. I also realized during this period of my life that I was in love with my own creativity. I was never happier than when I was using my mind to find solutions to intractable problems.

SELF-ACTUALIZING (40–49 YEARS)

When you reach your 40s, sometimes a little earlier and sometimes a little later, your soul begins to make its presence felt in your life. If you have mastered your survival, safety and

security needs and have successfully moved through the individuating stage of development, you will start to search for meaning and purpose in your life; you will be looking for a vocation or calling that allows you to fully express your authentic self. Welcome to the self-actualizing stage of development.

For most people, finding their vocation or calling usually begins with a feeling of unease or boredom about their job, profession or chosen career—with the work they thought would enable them to feel secure by providing them with a good income and prospects for advancement leading to increased wealth, status or power. Uncovering your soul's purpose not only brings vitality to your life, it also sparks your creativity. You will become more intuitive and spend more time in a state of flow; being totally present to what you are doing, and feeling committed and passionate about your work.

Some people find their vocation early, others discover it much later; some spend their whole lives searching. Uncovering and embracing your soul's purpose is vitally important because it is the key to living a fulfilling life.

Mastering the self-actualizing stage of development can be challenging, especially if your vocation or calling offers less security than the job, profession or career you trained for earlier in your life. You may feel scared or uncomfortable embarking in a new direction that does not pay the rent or finance your children's education but does bring meaning and purpose to your life.

Your ability to manage your survival needs will significantly influence your ability to make progress at the self-actualizing stage of development. Knowing you can take care of yourself gives you the confidence you need to explore your self-expression. If you are afraid that you might not be able to survive doing what you love to do, you may deny your soul expression.

The subconscious beliefs you learned during the surviving stage of development play an important role at this time in your life. If you have any subconscious fear-based beliefs that the world is an unsafe place, you will tend to err on caution; you will not take risks. You will never reach your full potential. This will lead to suffering later in life. If you have any fear-based beliefs about your meeting your survival needs, they will show up at this stage of your life.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GOALS AT THE SELF-ACTUALIZING STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

The primary leadership development goals at the self-actualizing stage of psychological development are to a) release any fears you may have about fully expressing who you really are;



b) find your purpose in life—the work that you love to do; and c) express your creativity. In addition, you will want opportunities to align your purpose with your work so you find meaning in your life. You will want a job that allows you to fully express who you are. If you cannot fully express who you are, you will become disengaged.

By the time I reached my mid-forties I had reached the top of my profession. I was a full-time advisor to the World Bank on matters of urban transport planning and engineering. It was precisely at this moment I became bored with my career. I realized my passion lay elsewhere. I had learned that I did not want to manage people and that I was no longer interested in engineering. I quickly realized, having spent some time thinking about it, that what I was passionate about was transformation, not transportation. I realized that I had been studying psychology, spirituality, and philosophy all my life. During the next few years, I wrote a couple of books on personal and corporate transformation, invented a way of measuring consciousness by mapping values to the seven levels of consciousness model, and left the World Bank. It took me seven years to work through this process.

INTEGRATING (50–59 YEARS)

If you learned how to master your survival, safety and security needs and were successful in traversing the individuating and self-actualizing stages of development, when you reach your 50s, you will want to embrace your soul's purpose by making a difference in the world. To do this you will need to connect with others; to form unconditional caring relationships with those you want to help and those you want to collaborate with to leverage your impact in the world. Welcome to the integrating stage of psychological development.

Connecting with others who share your passion and purpose and connecting with those who will be the beneficiaries of your gifts and talents are essential components of this stage of development. To connect with and support others, you will need to tap into your empathy skills. You will need to feel what others are feeling if you are truly going to help them.

At this stage of development, you must be able to recognize your limitations, cooperate with others, assume a larger sense of identity and shift from being independent to being interdependent.

Some people get so wrapped up in themselves and their calling at the self-actualizing stage that they are unable to make this shift. They get lost in their own creativity, focusing only on their self-expression, rather than the larger contribution they could make if they connected with others. There is nothing wrong with this approach; however, in normal circumstances, learning



to work with others in service to the common good is more likely to bring a sense of fulfilment to your life than working on your own.

How well you mastered the conforming stage of development will significantly influence your progress through the integrating stage of development. Being in touch with your feelings and knowing you can handle your relationship needs—knowing you are lovable—gives you the confidence to create unconditional loving relationships with others later in life. If you have any fear-based beliefs about feeling loved, they will show up at this stage of your life.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GOALS AT THE INTEGRATING STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

The primary leadership development goals at the integrating stage of psychological development are to a) release any fears you have about forming unconditional loving relationships; b) develop your empathy and social intelligence skills; and, c) connect with other like-minded individuals to make a difference in the world. In addition, you will want opportunities to collaborate or cooperate with others on projects that allow you to actualize your purpose in life. If you cannot connect with others to make a difference, you will become disengaged.

I realized by the time I reached my mid-fifties that if I wanted to make a significant difference in the world, I would need to connect with other like-minded people who were interested in transformation. I set up the Barrett Values Centre and started promoting the Seven Levels of Consciousness model® and the associated Cultural Transformation Tools®. We developed partnerships with individuals all over the world to train people in the use of the Cultural Transformation Tools. Within a few years, we were working in 25 different countries.

SERVING (60+ YEARS)

The last stage of development follows naturally from the integrating stage. This is the serving stage of development. This stage of development usually begins to occur in your early 60s, sometimes a little earlier, sometimes a little later. The focus of this stage of development is on self-less service to the community you identify with. It is about making a contribution. It does not matter how big or small your contribution is, what is important is knowing that your life has a purpose. Alleviating suffering, caring for the disadvantaged and building a better society are some of the activities you may want to explore at this stage of your life.

At you enter the serving stage of development, you will find yourself becoming more introspective and reflective—looking for ways to deepen your sense of connection to your soul and whatever you consider divine. You may become a keeper of wisdom, an elder of the community or a person to whom younger people turn for guidance or mentoring.

As you make progress with this stage of development, you will uncover new levels of compassion in your life. You will experience a deep sense of meaning and feelings of fulfillment and well-being that you never experienced before. You will begin to see how connected we all are; how, by serving others, you are serving your larger self. At this level of consciousness, giving becomes the same as receiving.

How well you mastered the differentiating stage of development will significantly influence your progress through the serving stage of development. Having a healthy sense of self-esteem will give you the confidence to go out into your community and make your skills, gifts, and talents available to those who need them. If you have any fear-based beliefs about your self-worth, they will show up at this stage of your life.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT GOALS AT THE SERVING STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

The primary leadership development goals at the serving stage of psychological development are to a) release any fears you have about your self-worth; b) develop your compassion skills; and, c) let yourself be guided by your soul's inspiration. In addition, you will want opportunities to alleviate suffering and care for the well-being of future generations, humanity, and the planet. If you cannot make a contribution, you will become disengaged.

Having spent eight years building up and managing the Barrett Values Centre, it was time to focus on my real passion; it was time to liberate myself from managing people and unleash my creativity. One of my colleagues took over as the CEO of my company and I became Chairman. This freed me up from the day-to-day management of the company and allowed me to focus on becoming a thought leader in the field of values, culture, and leadership. From my mid-sixties to the present day I have written six books—a book every year. This is my contribution to building a better world. Every day I wake up full of purpose and can't wait to get to work. I have never been happier and more fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Each stage of development represents an expansion of consciousness. The more conscious you are, the more ability you will have to manage complexity. If you never make it past the individuating stage of development, the best you can hope for is to become a good manager. If you are able to individuate and self-actualize you may become a good team leader. If you are able to individuate, self-actualize and integrate you may become a good organizational leader. But to be remembered by society as a great leader you will need to master the serving stage of development.

For a fuller understanding of the role ego-soul dynamics plays in our lives I refer you to, *Evolutionary Coaching: A Values-Based Approach to Unleashing Human Potential*, *A New Psychology of Human Well-Being: An Exploration of the Influence of Ego-Soul Dynamics on Mental and Physical Health*, *The New Leadership Paradigm: Leading Self, Leading Others, Leading an Organization, Leading in Society*.

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